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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides guidelines for writing job descriptions for secondary school counselors in Georgia, based on the "Program Planning Guide: Georgia Comprehensive Guidance" model. The counselor's role, as described in the document, focuses on four components: the guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. Each area is briefly defined with the counselor's role/responsibility in each area specifically stated. Responsibilities under each component are listed in the order of importance. A chart which gives suggested percentages of time allocations for various guidance activities is provided. Questions representing issues that have been the subject of disagreement are included. Both positive and negative responses are given as well as recommendations to help school systems resolve these issues. A job description evaluation form concludes the document. (BL)

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Secondary School Counseling Job Description

Georgia Comprehensive Guidance

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Preface

Standards for Georgia Public Schools requires each school system to have "written job descriptions which outline the duties and working relationships of each administrative, supervisory and student services support position." Student services positions include secondary school counselors. Many secondary counselors have been working without written job descriptions and have become involved in clerical and quasi-administrative tasks. The Carnegie Foundation's report entitled "High School — A Report on Secondary Education in America" cites several inadequacies in current guidance services and recommends "a more adequate system of student counseling" and expanded guidance services.

The Guidance and Counseling Unit of the Georgia Department of Education formed a task force in the summer of 1982 to develop a model job description for secondary school counselors. In executing this assignment, the task force analyzed two previous studies. One of these was a survey conducted for two consecutive years (1981 and 1982) with all school systems in Georgia concerning the current functions of secondary counselors. The second study was the Counselor Certification Project conducted between 1972 and 1978. This project assessed, analyzed, verified and validated four major knowledge areas and six performance (skill) areas required of effective counselors.

The task force also reviewed the *Program Planning Guide: Georgia Comprehensive Guidance* as well as national and local secondary counselor's job descriptions. Using all of this information and the Nominal Group Process, the task force developed this secondary school counselor model job description.

Introduction

The secondary school counselor's role varies greatly from system to system and in some systems from school to school. This causes confusion among school staff members as to the purpose of counselors, a lack of direction for counselors themselves and often poor guidance programs for students. The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines within which each counselor's role (job description) can be established.

Many guidance activities require the involvement of various school personnel; however, this paper addresses only the counselor's responsibilities (functions). Counselor functions should be determined by the guidance program goals of the local school system. Program goals are based on identified student needs. As students change or as new groups of students enter a school, the needs change causing the counselor's activities to be altered somewhat from year to year in order to accomplish program goals.

The counselor's duties, activities and functions described in this document should be used to develop an individual job description necessary for achieving local system guidance program goals. Input from administrators, teachers, parents, counselors and perhaps students and others is important in formulating and validating this description. The reality of working in a public school means that staff may have extraneous duties and clerical assignments. Although counselors may participate in these duties, the job description should include **no more clerical or extraneous assignments than assigned to any other professional school staff member.**

After an individual job description has been written, the principal should discuss the role description with the counselor in great detail. If disagreement exists, it is important to take the time to negotiate all differences. Counselors can be effective only when they have a clear understanding of their role and have the support of the administration.

Many of the functions and activities described in this document are familiar to school personnel and will be briefly stated. However, a few activities need special elaboration since they have been the subject of disagreements in the past. These issues will be discussed in a question and answer format giving the pros and cons and concluding with a recommendation for each question.

Secondary Counseling Job Description

The counselor's role as described here focuses on four components: the guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services and system support. These four components comprise a model guidance program as described in the *Program Planning Guide: Georgia Comprehensive Guidance*. Each area is briefly defined below with the counselor's role/responsibility in each area specifically stated. Responsibilities under each component are listed in the order of importance. Counselors should give the most weight/priority or spend the majority of their time in those functions/activities listed at the beginning of each component.

Component I — The Guidance Curriculum

The guidance curriculum encompasses structured developmental guidance experiences presented systematically through groups (including classrooms) to promote growth of the psychological aspects of human development (e.g. self-understanding, interpersonal relations, decision-making including career, goal setting and problem solving). While the entire school faculty has responsibility for the delivery of the guidance curriculum, the counselor's responsibilities include the organization and implementation of classroom guidance, group guidance, group teacher advisement and peer programs.

Classroom guidance — The counselor team teaches or assists in teaching a guidance curriculum activity or unit in the classroom. This is not limited to one or two subjects but includes all areas in the total school curriculum. These activities may be held in either the classroom or the career guidance center.

Group guidance — The counselor conducts groups outside the regular classroom for students with identified interests or needs. The counselor plans and leads structured activities to increase the skills and knowledge of the students participating.

Group teacher advisement — The counselor serves as an advisor to a small group of student advisees, leads group activities with his or her advisees and or coordinates a team of teacher advisors.

Peer programs — The counselor selects, instructs and supervises students helping students. The scope of the peer program depends on the needs of the students but may include study skills, tutoring, peer facilitators, career development and the like.

Component II — Individual Planning

Individual planning refers to the activities designed to help students monitor and direct their own learning and personal development. Functions of the counselor in this component include individual advisement, placement and individual appraisal.

Individual advisement — The counselor facilitates student growth and development by training teachers through staff development to assist students individually or by assisting students themselves on an individual basis.

Placement — The counselor assists students in exploring, selecting and following through on alternatives to achieve their life goals. The counselor may use career information, contracts, tests, independent study, work experience or the like to aid the students.

Individual appraisal — The counselor assists students in assessing their unique characteristics through inventories, interviews, etc. and in processing information about themselves.

Component III — Responsive Services

Responsive services are reactions to immediate needs and concerns of individuals whether these concerns involve information, counseling, consultation or referral. Even though the guidance program is the responsibility of the entire staff, the counselor has special training and possesses skills needed for these areas. The counselor's responsibilities include group counseling, individual counseling, consultation, information dissemination and referral.

Group counseling — The counselor conducts group counseling sessions for those students experiencing problems or difficulty in handling normal developmental tasks. Examples include academic difficulties, personal loss, parenting, etc.

Individual counseling — The counselor gives empathy and support to students experiencing problems while assisting students to identify problems and causes, alternatives, possible consequences and to take action when appropriate.

Consultation — The counselor consults with parents, teachers, other educators and community agencies regarding behavior change strategies for resolving student problems.

Information giver/disseminator — The counselor maintains and disseminates to students current information related to self-exploration, career exploration, postsecondary education information, occupational information and community resources.

Referral — The counselor, in recognition of personal and professional limitations, uses the professional resources of the school and community.

Component IV — System Support

System support activities are those which establish, maintain and enhance the preceding three guidance areas. Techniques to accomplish this might include program development, staff development, materials development, parent education, the testing program and community relations.

Program development — The counselor assesses the guidance needs of the students, faculty and community and designs a guidance program addressing these needs. The counselor evaluates the guidance program through various processes to determine if it is on target and goals will be accomplished. If not, appropriate changes are made.

Staff development — The counselor assesses his or her training needs as well as those of the faculty for guidance program implementation and improvement. The counselor plans and implements appropriate staff development.

Materials development — The counselor develops appropriate materials for staff development, classroom guidance and group guidance sessions consistent with guidance program goals.

Parent education — The counselor plans and leads guidance programs for parents which may include information dissemination and skill building to help them become more effective parents.

Testing program — The counselor may be responsible for the management of the testing program. When test results are received, the counselor interprets scores to students and/or provides teacher in-service on test interpretation.

Community relations — The counselor serves as a public relations person to promote the guidance program. The counselor may write articles for the newspaper or public service radio announcements, speak at community functions, etc.

Time Allocations

Below is a chart which gives suggested percentages of time for various guidance activities. These allocations are offered as a model. Time allocations may vary from program to program.

	Percent of Time
Component I — The Guidance Curriculum	**35%**
A. Classroom guidance	16%
B. Group guidance	10%
C. Group teacher advisement	3%
D. Peer program	3%
E. Other	3%
Component II — Individual Planning	**15%**
A. Individual advisement	5%
B. Placement	5%
C. Individual appraisal	2%
D. Other	3%
Component III — Responsive Services	**25%**
A. Group counseling	8%
B. Individual counseling	7%
C. Consultation	5%
D. Information dissemination	3%
E. Referral	2%
Component IV — System Support	**25%**
A. Program development and evaluation*	6%
B. Staff development	6%
C. Materials development	4%
D. Parent education	4%
E. Testing program	2%
F. Community relations (PR)	2%
G. Other	1%

This function is of utmost importance. To accomplish guidance program goals in an efficient and effective manner, programs* ***must* *be carefully designed and evaluated.*

Issues

The following questions represent issues which have been the subject of disagreements. Positives and negatives as well as recommendations are included to help systems resolve these issues.

Question 1 — *Should counselors participate in correcting discipline problems?*

Answer — Yes, because counselors have special skills in understanding students with problems and can suggest alternative measures for correcting and changing behavior.

Answer — No, because prescribing or administering punishment places the counselor in an adversary role with the student and destroys the counselor-student relationship.

Recommendation — Counselors should never be involved if the student is to receive disciplinary action *(i.e.*, corporal punishment, suspension). However, if the student is to receive no disciplinary action, the counselor may be involved in positive corrective measures for changing behavior.

Question 2 — *Should counselors be responsible for the scheduling of all students?*

Answer — Yes, counselors have knowledge of the total school offerings and an understanding of individual student needs and abilities.

Answer — No, counselors cannot know all the students well enough to recommend what courses should be taken. Besides, the clerical aspect of scheduling is extremely wasteful of counselor time and training.

Recommendation — If counselors assume the responsibility for scheduling all students, they are no longer counselors but become registrars or clerical technicians. This not only eliminates availability to a quality guidance program for students but also wastes state and local funds. Counselors may talk with individual students concerning courses to take to achieve long range goals. Counselors may also be involved with the scheduling of their 15-25 advisees if the school uses a teacher advisement program.

Questions 3 — *Should counselors be responsible for incidental tasks which arise daily such as taking students home, collecting assignments, calling absentees or substituting for teachers who are late or absent?*

Answer — Yes, because of the good rapport it facilitates between students, teachers and parents with the counselor and because of the difficulty of finding anyone else to do it.

Answer — No, counselors have a planned day of activities to carry out toward achieving guidance program goals.

Recommendation — Counselors, if they are to be effective, should have no more clerical or extraneous assignments than other professional staff. Counselors should keep a calendar and, for the most part, the day's activities should be planned in advance to meet identified student needs.

Question 4 — *Should counselors be responsible for test coordination, monitoring, etc?*

Answer — Yes, counselors have knowledge of testing.

Answer — No, counselors' training/knowledge of testing is limited to test interpretation not test administration. Also, the increased volume of testing would require an inordinate amount of counselor time.

Recommendation — The testing program should be the responsibility of the total staff. Counselors may be involved with test administration and coordination. However, the tasks involved such as counting out test booklets and alphabetizing answer sheets should be delegated to clerical staff or to a responsible student aide.

Question 5 — *Should counselors lead staff development sessions?*

Answer — Yes, counselors have special training and skills that enable them to lead effective staff development sessions.

Answer — No, staff development sessions are always more effective when led by someone from outside the school setting.

Recommendation — Staff development is defined here as the teaching and acquisition of skills through group participation (not someone simply lecturing). Counselors do indeed have skills in communication training, human relations and other areas needed by all staff members. Counselors are excellent resources in the school to lead staff development sessions related to guidance. Benefits include the cost (free) and the staff seeing the skills of the counselor. The staff may become more skilled as a result of staff development participation and by becoming more knowledgeable of the counselor's skill, may refer more students to the counselor.

Question 6 — *Should counselors be involved in the classroom?*

Answer — Yes, because some identified student needs can best be met through classroom instruction. In addition, students will have additional contacts with the counselor and will be more likely to go to the counselor's office if he or she has been approachable in the classroom.

Answer — No, because the counselor should be available for crisis counseling at all times. This is not possible if the counselor is involved in classroom instruction.

Recommendation — Guidance skills should be included in all curriculum areas of the secondary school. The counselor is an excellent resource person for leading classroom guidance activities. The counselor should not be the person to teach an entire course but should definitely be the resource person upon whom all academic areas call to assist in classroom guidance instruction.

Question 7 — *Should counselors lead counseling groups?*

Answer — Yes, students having problems often learn from a group with good, strong leadership. Groups are also a time efficient way of helping students.

Answer — No, group sessions require that students miss their classes to attend the group. They fall behind in their academic subjects which is the main reason they are in school.

Recommendation — Students experiencing the effects of divorce, loss, abuse, etc. are rarely able to fully concentrate on their academic studies and their grades often drop. Groups help students verbalize their feelings and explore alternatives on these and other areas of concern. Scheduling of group sessions can be flexible so that students seldom miss the same class. Counselors definitely should be involved in leading groups in the school.

Question 8 — *Should counselors share information given by students with the principal or teachers?*

Answer — Yes, all educators should be aware of problems students are encountering because of the effects on academic performance and behavior.

Answer — No, to relay information shared in privacy destroys the student's confidence in the counselor.

Recommendation — Counselors should be aware of the ethical standards of their profession and maintain constant efforts to adhere to those standards. The primary obligation is to respect the integrity and promote the welfare of the client, consequently, every effort must be made to protect the confidentiality of the counseling relationship. However, school counselors also have an ethical responsibility to the institution within which the service is performed. If unresolved conflicts exist, procedural guidelines as established in the ethical standards (AACD Ethical Standards — American School Counselors Association) should be followed.

Question 9 — *Should counselors do the initial testing/screening for all special education referrals?*

Answer — Yes, counselors have knowledge of testing and skills for making students feel at ease in testing situations.

Answer — No, the screening process is so time consuming that counselors would do little else if they had this assignment as a major responsibility.

Recommendation — Counselors may be involved in staff development designed to train teachers in characteristics of special students. However, due to time constraints and guidance program goals, counselors should have limited involvement in the screening process. The more appropriate screeners would be those professionals who would work on an individual daily basis with the students if they were placed in a special program.

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Secondary Counselors Job Description

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